

Similarities Between Long Island, NY, Dallas TX, and Park City, UT? The Social Marketing Process, at least

By Jack Wilbur
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Last week I was in New York and Connecticut conducting introductory social marketing workshops for representatives of organizations that work in and around the Long Island Sound to promote improved water quality, wildlife habitat, etc.

The Long Island Sound divides CT and Long Island NY. While I was there I was thinking some about division and differences. There are some cultural and social differences among locals in various parts of Long Island, between them and many people on the CT side of the Sound, and among more urban and more suburban residents in Connecticut. Then I thought about places where I have on-going projects, such a rural area in Central Pennsylvania, inner city South East Washington D.C., part of the Dallas, Texas Metroplex, and the three or four distinct areas of Utah where I am helping out with on-going efforts. I usually think about the social and cultural difference within watersheds and between watersheds from different regions because almost always when I teach social marketing workshops, there is a person or two in the class who asks how the process can be universal when the people in his or her area are so unique.

I usually offer two answers: there are some aspects about human nature that are universal, and the social marketing process is designed to learn about and tap into those cultural, social and geographic differences that exist within your watershed and make your watershed unique compared to other places. Some of the behavior change approaches that tap into universal aspects of human nature include the use of social norms, incentives, prompts, commitments and building motivation over time. We study existing audience research data and conduct new research to tap into what makes an individual community unique and to understand which approaches, techniques, and message distribution choices will provide the best results.

When it is all said and done, social marketing provides a relatively standardized approach to behavior change-based outreach that celebrates our cultural, social and geographic differences. When used correctly, social marketing can be as effective in Clear Creek as Muddy Creek, Long Island Sound and Short Creek, and Little Nishaminy River and Big Water.